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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [PREF](#) [CH](#) [NP](#)
SUBJECT: NEPAL: TIBETAN SETTLEMENT LEADERS DESCRIBE
COMMUNITY'S VULNERABILITIES

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Classified By: DCM Nicholas Dean for reasons 1.4 (b/d).

Summary

¶1. (C) In a December 12 meeting with RefCoord, Tibetan settlement leaders described the lack of employment opportunities for Tibetan youths and the difficulties in obtaining and renewing identification and travel documents from the Government of Nepal (GON). Out of roughly 4,000 Tibetan residents within their settlements, nearly 1,600 have not been registered or issued refugee cards (RCs). Seventy-five percent of these are the sons and daughters of Tibetan RC holders and, therefore, could be eligible for RCs themselves. Although Tibetan refugees are comparatively better off than the Bhutanese refugees in Nepal, recent incidents at the airport and involving Maoist extortion highlight Tibetans' uncertain status, making it difficult for them to feel optimistic about their future.

Refugee Status is Inherently Difficult

¶2. (C) On December 12, RefCoord met with two Tibetan settlement leaders, Tsering Dhondup, who represents the Jawalakhel Handicraft Center/Patan community of roughly 1,450 Tibetans, and (NFN) Norbu, who represents the Swayambhu and Kathmandu population of roughly 2,500 Tibetans. There are eight settlement leaders in Nepal, of whom two are elected by their constituencies and six are appointed by the Department of Home of the Tibetan "Government-in-Exile," representing a total population of between 16,000 to 20,000 Tibetans in Nepal.

¶3. (C) Both Dhondup and Norbu cited the difficulties faced by Tibetans living illegally or with refugee status in Nepal. Of the 1,450 Tibetans in Jawalakhel/Patan, about 400 needed government-issued refugee cards (RCs) while roughly 1,150 of the 2,500 Kathmandu residents needed RCs. With or without an RC, Tibetans were not permitted to work legally, to own land, or to open a shop, they said. For example, Dhondup noted that the Government of Nepal (GON) overlooked the illegal employment of Tibetans at the Jawalakhel Handicraft Center, which produced handmade Tibetan carpets for sale. He worried that the GON could decide to crack down on the center's operations, leaving the community with few resources to feed, house and clothe the residents.

¶4. (C) Norbu, in his early 30s, was appointed to his current position in March 2006. He noted in particular the dissatisfaction among Tibetan youth with their refugee status. In fact, the majority of Tibetan youth lived without any legal documentation in Nepal, he said. Norbu commented that many had managed to achieve a high-school or

university-level education, but could find only basic employment opportunities, such as in restaurants or retail shops. A young Tibetan who would like to practice nursing in a hospital, for example, had to show a Nepalese passport in order to be considered for the position, he added.

15. (C) Norbu welcomed RefCoord's suggestion that the recently-passed Citizenship Bill (described reftel) would allow non-registered Tibetans to apply for Nepalese citizenship. He believed many young Tibetan adults residing in Nepal for the past twenty years might benefit from this legislation. Norbu doubted, however, that the Tibetan Government-in-exile would either support or discourage Tibetans in Nepal from applying for Nepalese citizenship. Similar to Jigme Dorje of the Office of Tibet (reftel), Dhondup appeared to dislike the suggestion altogether.

Obtaining Documentation is Fraught with Corruption

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16. (C) Both settlement leaders noted the difficulties in obtaining refugee cards for the sons and daughters of RC holders, renewing RCs with local government authorities, and securing travel documents for all Tibetans in Nepal. Within their settlements, Dhondup and Norbu said they had a combined population of 1,200 Tibetans comprising the sons and daughters of RC holders above the age of 18 who were eligible for, but had not been issued, RCs. (Note: Post has raised this issue multiple times with Home and Foreign Ministry interlocutors, unfortunately with little result. End Note.) Dhondup further noted that RC holders had to renew their cards annually with the Chief District Officer (CDO) in their area. The official fee for renewing an RC was NRs 100 (roughly \$1.45), he said. However, depending upon the CDO's attitude toward Tibetans and the level of corruption in the office, Tibetan RC holders had to pay anywhere between NRs 400 - 1,000 (roughly \$6-14).

17. (C) Even more difficult than obtaining or renewing RCs was trying to acquire a GON travel document, Dhondup opined. He described his recent experience of obtaining a travel document for himself, noting that it was significantly easier for him as a settlement leader than it would be for other Tibetan refugees. First, he commented, only RC holders could apply for a travel document. Even with an RC, a Tibetan had to first apply to the municipal authorities for a letter of support. According to Dhondup, he paid a bribe of NRs 5,000 (roughly \$70) for this first letter. Then, an RC holder had to show the letter from the municipality to the CDO office and obtain a similar letter from the CDO. This letter cost Dhondup another NRs 5,000 (\$70) in bribe money. Afterward, he had to carry the CDO letter to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs' (MFA) passport section. Thankfully, Dhondup said, he was not asked to pay an additional bribe at MFA. According to the official fee structure, travel documents were to be provided free of cost.

18. (C) On December 15, a Consular locally-employed staff (LES) who is Tibetan reported that a Tibetan family had been prevented by immigration authorities from leaving through the airport recently. According to the LES, these friends had valid GON refugee travel documents and foreign visas. Despite this, airport immigration authorities claimed that all refugees were now required to obtain a "No Objection Certificate" from the Department of Immigration headquarters prior to their departure. (Note: Post will follow up with the Department of Immigration to determine whether this reflects a change in policy or if it is an isolated incident. End Note.)

Indian Embassy Discontinued Issuance of Transportation Letters

¶9. (C) According to Dhondup, the Embassy of India in Kathmandu used to provide RC holders with transportation letters, similar to entry permits, allowing travel to India for medical or religious purposes. When he applied in November 2006 for such a letter, he was informed that the Indian Embassy had discontinued this practice. Norbu, however, asserted that Tibetans in India encountered far less difficulty with government authorities than in Nepal. RC holders typically paid a bribe of only NRs 100 to GON immigration at the border for permission to cross into India while undocumented Tibetans usually had to pay 5 or 10 times that amount, Norbu said.

Maoist Extortion within the Tibetan Community

¶10. (C) RefCoord met on December 14 with Office of Tibet Secretary Jigme Wangdu, who detailed recent attempts by

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Maoist cadre to extort members of the Tibetan community in Kathmandu. Wangdu reported that a group of 4 or 5 Maoists had approached the principal of Namgyal High School this week and demanded an undefined number of "lakhs rupees" (one lakh

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is 100,000 rupees, equivalent to roughly \$1,500). Located roughly 15 kilometers northeast of the Kathmandu ring road, Namgyal HS had approximately 500 students, many of whom received direct funding by the Tibetan "Government-in-Exile." According to Wangdu, the Maoists had used rough language and condemned Tibetans as "agents of the Americans." In a separate incident on December 13, Wangdu said, Maoists had visited the Jawalakhel Handicraft Center and had met with Dhondup. The Maoists had requested Dhondup to give them the keys to an empty building on the premises. Wangdu asserted that Dhondup had replied he first needed to seek permission from his authorities before he could provide access. Wangdu worried that the Maoists intended to house cadre at the center and that "once they move in, they would never move out."

Comment

¶11. (C) While Tibetan refugees live comparatively better than Bhutanese refugees in Nepal, living here as an undocumented Tibetan is inherently risky. Without legal status or protection, these individuals face being arrested at any time for immigration violations, which are often accompanied by hefty fines. Even those Tibetans who hold RCs are restricted by law from working or owning land. While Maoist extortion of Kathmandu residents continues to affect every rung of the social ladder, Tibetans legal status in Nepal prevents them from easily seeking protection or justice. The Nepalese authorities currently overlook the illegal presence of Tibetans in Nepal and their commercial activities. However, the possibility that this could change makes it difficult for Tibetans to view their future with optimism.

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